

Status of Women

NEWSLETTER

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

One of the priorities of the Permanent Review Committee on the Status of Women is to address what can be called the absence and silence of women. In the Faculty of Fine Arts, where women are often a majority in numbers, their absence and silence can take a variety of forms. These range from disproportionately few professional opportunities such as full-time teaching positions, to the less tangible but very powerful disavowing of subject matter that concerns or interests us as students, staff, instructors and artists, and the disavowing of methodologies and languages bearing values different than the patriarchal values of conventional institutional practises.

By way of a brief introduction to the Permanent Review Committee on the Status of Women, I asked three artists on the Committee about absence and silence in the context of women making art. They are each artists of different backgrounds, and I was working on the premise that they might have met feminism at different moments in its history, and would perhaps then be different sorts of feminists. As the interviews unrolled, each participant for the most part discarded my neat schedule of questions and spoke in their own ways about their lives as women and as artists, and it was their *methodologies* as they appeared in and through their respective discourses - their languages - that became the basis of my enquiry. It is these experiences of a language's structure - the "objects" around which it moves, the organization of its logic, of *how* things were said, that became for me a primary level of content.

One of the women who spoke with me

is Regine Mainberger. She was an activist in the first wave of feminism in the 1960's and 70's. In response to my request for background information, she told a long and fascinating story that wove people, historical circumstances, and events into the narrative

SPEAKING

Susan Balz

in which she became an activist. She described an early understanding, through the people close to her, of the existence and nature of oppression, and she directed her energies towards combatting it. She bound personal history to "H"istory in fluid contingency, but her own art practise, one of the sites, for many people, of dealing with internalized oppression, seemed to have played an ancillary role next to her political activism and the family that she was by then raising. So ABSENCE figured largely in her experiences in terms of her specific political engagements with the problem of the oppression of women and its effects, their ABSENCE AND SILENCE, on a grand scale. It also seems to me to have operated reflexively, in her privileging of other engagements and responsibilities - of her family, of "H"istory, of her more direct forms of activism - over her artmaking, both historically and in her discussion with me, despite how highly she values it. In this secondary positioning, her own artmaking and her own needs seem to have, for a long time, devolved around a kind of an ABSENCE for her, despite the intellectual knowing of the problem as a social one and the will, although always directed outwards, to redress it. Regine says that this attempt at redress only much later came to be directed inward towards the repositioning of her own art production in her own mind. I understand her candid speech on the subject

There is powerful movement ...





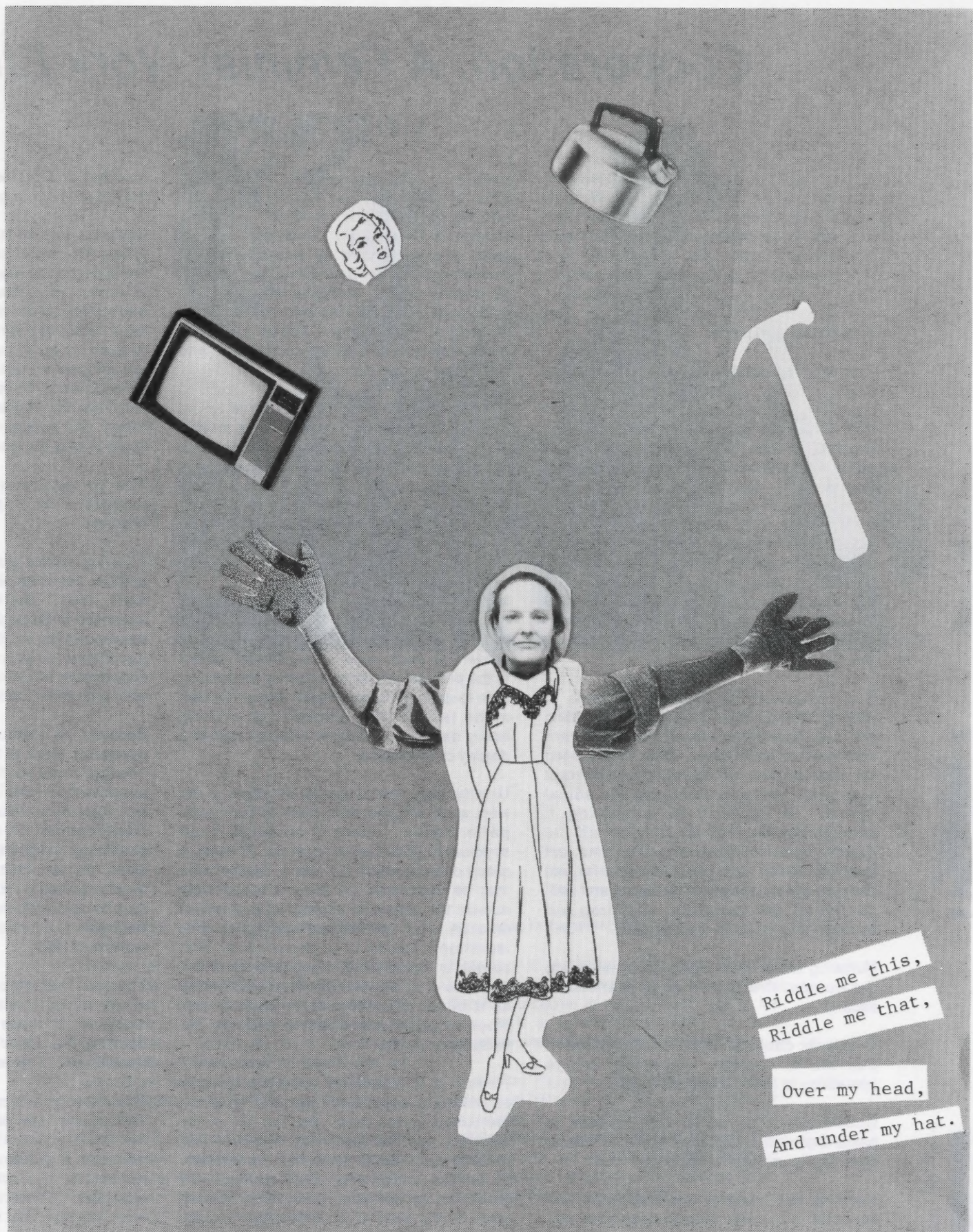
as a sign of the yet further banishment of SILENCE (silence).

Karilee Fuglem, who is a woman of my own generation, spoke about ABSENCE through a much different method. ABSENCE was said to have been perceived gradually, and still almost implicitly; not so much an analysable object in itself as a thing which imbues everything else. But it became evident to me that Karilee is the inheritor of a feminist *politic*, a world view involving an alternative way of thinking about things altogether. Although it owes its possibility to the necessarily reformist feminism of the first wave, this politic differs greatly and I hear its character in Karilee's *manner of speaking*. She traverses a subject and the areas around it in speech, her speech is structured with its "objects" at the centre, rarely actually laying a hand on them, and yet gradually casting them as its objects nonetheless. And this seems to reflect a methodology which operates from the perimeters of things. This is the position perhaps of one who is absent/silent from the "centre", and it is precisely the position that has become deliberate for some feminists, that has been developed into a politic. This is part of a feeling, which we talked about, of a swinging between the radical extremes of confidence and certainty, and an awareness of the fragility of that certainty - the feeling that one has no right to judge. ABSENCE is recognized here in this oblique way: the self-conscious subjectivity is incorporated into her thinking and recognized. It is recognized as a check and balance operating as a positive aspect of feminist consciousness.

In a conversation with yet another of our members, Lynn Hughes, ABSENCE was acknowledged as an overt restriction of opportunity in really one instance only - in a girls' school where no sciences were taught, thus destining the students, to some extent, to the arts. Beyond that, Lynn avoided institutions as much as possible and her education was gathered for the most part informally and nomadically, so that she was able to avoid institutional or structural ABSENCE AND SILENCE in that context. But her experience of restriction has underwritten much of her experience, in that it probably had some determining effect on how and what she studied and what field of work she later entered. She also embodies some very radical extremes - the sorts of extremes that could take the form of the self divided against itself, the split identity, or the mind/body duality to which the western consciousness is vulnerable. She spoke of this duality, of the manual and the

intellectual, and she said that she could never stand the feeling of being in any way removed from the world at large, either in the sense of the artist isolated in the studio, in the sense of someone who lives entirely in the realm of "M"ind, or in the sense of a polarity between the arts and the sciences - between art and life when the culture or life of the western world is science. But she does not experience these extremes as polarities or as discontinuous. She defines her production and her life as the project of collapsing this and parallel dichotomies into one broad term through a comparative method. Never linear and never focussed on only one reified object of enquiry, her comparative method seeks the transcendence of collapse - the transcendence of polarity, but also of banality, of cliché, of unnecessary expenditure, for the sake of the fullest possible range and scale of movement. And so she is glad to have become an artist, and she has reversed the experience of restriction and absence. In this reversed sense, it figures deliberately and prominently in her life and work.

In summary, these were three very different sorts of experiences of very different relationships to the question of ABSENCE AND SILENCE, moving through overt and pragmatic awareness of the issue and action upon it, through a deliberate reversal of the effects of the ABSENCE paradigm towards unification and collapse, through a consciousness where its figure is taken for granted, given a place, and put to use, both in the public and perhaps especially in the interior worlds. I spoke with only a few members of our Committee, and these are only a few of the forms that absence and silence and their transformation can take. Transformations of the experience of restriction and oppression are produced by women continually and prolifically - a long history and a vastly multiple presence of reinvention and resistance. I welcome you to the Permanent Review Committee on the Status of Women in our continuing effort to analyse, deconstruct and reconstruct our places in the world and specifically in this Faculty as students, instructors, staff, artists, women. ■



Riddle me this,
Riddle me that,
Over my head,
And under my hat.

Cooperation: A Feminist Work Ethic

• LINDA BIEN •

In the first Fine Arts Permanent Review Committee on the Status of Women newsletter, Corrine Corry talks about the need to "keep talking to ourselves about ourselves" and "to transform our representations in art and in education." This stimulated me to think about notions of cooperation and competition in the educational workplace.

Traditionally accepted female roles are wife, lover, mother, subordinate, supporter, organizer, fixer, nurturer. Not only have men traditionally not been taught to nurture and support, but they have been taught that their destiny is achieved by the opposite - by dominating, limiting, thwarting, and conquering. Recently, as women have tried to achieve equality in this society, they have adopted men's approaches to obtain power. Success in patriarchal society involves aggression, the protection of territorial rights, the subjugation of others, the aggregation of visible signs of power and distinction, such as awards, titles, money, perks, possessions, etc.

Such practises as grading students in relation to each other, judging and awarding art in competitions where the works are compared to each other, rather than judged for themselves or against an abstract standard, serve to reinforce the social norms. It wouldn't be surprising if competition like this abruptly cut off the creative career of those who need time and space to flower. It is often women who, not being taught by society to be strong and self-confident, are tentative, and drop out because they've been discouraged.

Nurturing talent is not achieved by enforcing the competitive practices of patriarchal society.

Creativity conflicts with the standards of patriarchal society. Creativity brings something to life. Competition kills.

Cooperation is not a work mode in patriarchal society because someone has to dominate in patriarchal society.

Nurturing and creativity and cooperation are essential to growth and development and

productivity. I believe that adopting strategies invented by men in patriarchal society to fulfil the need for personal recognition - prestige - financial security (previously obtained by women through marriage) is counter-productive. Men as well as women should re-eVALUE women's traditional work patterns and goal-directed strategies so we can adopt paths to achievement that are non-competitive and depend on cooperation.

Women in traditional settings have found over the millenia that mutual problem solving and sharing of information is beneficial to individuals and the group alike. Childcare is a shining example. Through the ages until very, very recently, women have shared with each other the responsibilities of bringing up young children. This benefitted both parent and child.

More can be done with fewer resources through cooperation. When several people work towards the same goal, it is more efficient to each work on a different aspect of the problem and bring together the results, than to each try to accomplish the entire task alone (which often depends on making heavy demands on female subordinates) in a display of machismo.

Unfortunately, the patriarchal structure of our work world will give more credit to the macho performance. There is no established structure to give credit to a group. At most, a group can get credit if it has a "leader" who may be designated as the one responsible outside the sphere of intellectual and artistic creation which are actually accomplished in isolation. You may or must cover that canvas or execute that arpeggio by yourself, but there is no way we can run the University as a bunch of unconnected individuals, though it often seems that is what we are called upon to do.

I doubt if it would be possible for any individual to accomplish much of what we are asked to do alone. But the University hierarchy and the system of incentives and rewards under which we work is competitive. Thus, the benefits of sharing work are countered by the disadvantages of sharing credit for the work. Even knowledge must be

hoarded and protected lest one get the credit for a good idea.

Keeping information secret and jockey for position is not always in the institution or the students' best interest to serve. Yet, it could be advantageous to one's personal career. Information has been withheld from one by another for a reason could, however, be more advantageous than what one might gain on one's own! It's hard to know if you have the slightest talent or not. But you can waste a lifetime trying to play the game.

The stereotype of women who hoard secrets is worth a couple of words, however.

Showing tenderness and understanding is another "feminine" trait that men are not supposed to have in their work lives. In the workplace, men are supposed to be businesslike, not emotional, depersonalized. Praise and criticism are permitted only in a formal, controlled, supposedly function as positive reinforcement with each other's roles, not with

Because the emotional energy of our personal lives is seen to be a distraction from the energy needed for our jobs, we are supposed to shed our personal feelings and happiness when we go to work. Displacement of emotion through gossiping, infighting, putting others down, ideas, undue criticism, backbiting, and trivial activities. Things that can become blown all out of proportion because they aren't balanced with other aspects of life.

The fact that personal feelings have no place at work also stifles the spontaneous responses of those around you. You do bring the joys or sorrows of your life with you. This can create

The stereotype of women who are more instinctually than linear-rational is based on a real ability to relate on a gut-emotional level. Women, but men, can develop the ability to be open and "listen" to our own inner selves. This is more than

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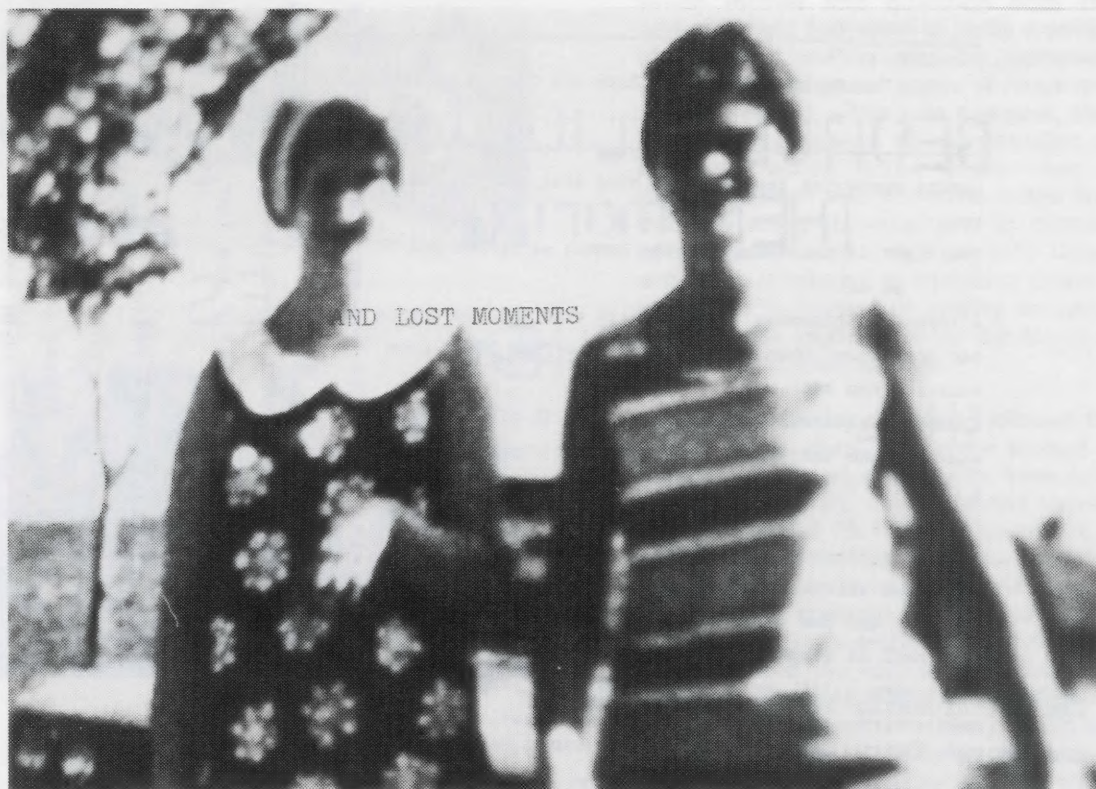
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Nancy Frohlick

attempting to stifle and ignore the inchoate.

Whether or not it is the proper role of art to strive to be entirely intellectual and devoid of emotional content or politically correct despite our all too human doubts and contradictory feelings, is a legitimate question to be addressed by artists and art historians, but no one should forget that human intellect is inFORMED by emotions.

One last traditional female mode of work could benefit us. We women have had to stay in tune with our body rhythms and the pace of unplanned events, even though industrialization imposed inhuman

schedules in the workplace.

Patriarchal workstyle is a race against colleagues and is measured by time-clocks. Putting obstacles in each others' way to be first with a solution can hold up real progress and emasculates the time clock.

I envision Feminist Workstyle to be goal-orientated behavior at a pace appropriate for ourselves in a collegial collectivity. This fulfills societal needs instead of personal ambition and self aggrandizement. It would be a transformation of ourselves from competitive to cooperative. ■

" George Elliot was Mary Ann Evans then Marian "

GEORGE ELLIOT was Mary Ann Evans then Marian

lurkin wondering looking something else need to fill the gap

the night is darkening and she cannot go on SHE SHE SHE

go on
a voyager a traveler a person with eyes for the taking
had they known what time it took them would have
shut the sun out

kindness generosity sweetness,,,,,SHE IS STILL A GIRL
whatever one thinks she is a woman yet they think SHE IS
A GIRL.

Silly that as a voyager a traveler she is not complete
even with those eyes

A passion exists and had it would have changed
the sky and the going into a fit of gloom,,the
sold soul as strained as can be, she is not complete with

those eyes A GIRL yet everyone knows she is not
The Relationship between Marian Evans
only a picture a memory of a something past.....
and George Henry Lewes is rightly considered

to be the single most important influence
of her life. Had she never met him, there
would have been no George Elliot. She
was an established writer in 1853, of course,
but, without the inspiration and the encouragement
that Lewes constantly provided, it is doubtful
that she would ever have tempted fiction, or
persevered in it after the first attempt. If,
as some critics have maintained, her novels were
written as a kind of reparation and expiation for
having defied the moral standards of Victorian
England, it has also been said that, in a sense,
the final outcome justified her decision. Her
decision was one which did shock and outrage
society, and deeply grieved her few devoted
friends, who, remembering her love and friendship
of long standing, nevertheless continued to
stand by her.

pages 98-99

George Elliot: A Biography

By Sprague

No, not forgot-eternally
Remains its memory dear;
But could the day seem dark to me
Because the night was fair

I gazed upon the cloudless moon,
And loved her all the night,
Till morning came and radiant noon
And I forgot-eternally her light-

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Theory Invasion



The Theory Invasion, a panel discussion hosted by the Permanent Review Committee on the Status of Women on March 23, offered a broad introduction to several areas of the contemporary theory surrounding artmaking, and to their usages in analyses of some of the criteria by which art is evaluated. Panelists Marilyn Burgess, Chris Martin, Beth Seaton and Jessica Bradley presented discussions of the modernist notion of a universalized standard of quality in art and the feminist challenging of it, of Marxism and its analysis of alienation and avant-garde "originality" in the market economy of capitalist patriarchy, of structuralism and post-structuralism and the changing paradigm through which subjectivity and the construction of meaning and truth is perceived, and of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory as it is significant to our concept of identity and how it is formed. All of these theoretical tools are concerned in some degree with subjectivity and its construction and the panelists made reference to the importance for feminism of recent theoretical work which no longer views the subject as a fixed and stable whole containing its own unique and magically guaranteed essence or authentic truth or meaning, but rather as unfixed and

in process, as contextualized and acted upon by external forces - a development which throws into question both the sovereign right that wants to justify a politics of domination, and the ostensibly appropriate and determined lesser status of those who are dominated. The last speaker, Nell Tenhaaf, presented an introduction to feminism which broke down what is sometimes seen as a monolithic united front into the many diverse, and in places, contradictory forms that it currently takes, and which is relevant to artmaking in that it identifies "criteria" of quality as value systems with implications for the status of women and challenges them.

A lively and ranging discussion followed the presentations which, due to the amount of material presented, necessarily were quite brief and summary, and expanded beyond them to consider the relationship, or lack of relationship, of artists to theory, and the desirability of an involvement with theory. Some of the material was considered in more detail in a workshop by Sheena Gourlay held the following Friday and Tuesday. Participants looked at definitions of terms used in current theory which are relevant to artists. Further to the discussions of criteria in artmaking as related to systems of value, the workshop looked at the different readings of artwork which are possible and brought into play, depending upon the context and the conceptual apparatus that the viewer brings with her or him to the artwork.

The Theory Invasion intended to provide an introduction to issues and theory that we felt were concerning students in the Faculty of Fine Arts, and to provide students with the opportunity to ask questions, to argue, to manifesto and so forth, and to *contend* with recent theoretical developments which, whether you choose to engage them or to ignore them, are out there. For people interested in pursuing some of the topics further, short bibliographies from each speaker and from the workshop are available from the Committee. We sincerely thank the speakers for a difficult job and much hard work well done. We also appreciate the many comments we've received from people about the event and expect that these comments will be very useful to us as we begin to prepare the next big thing - a pamphlet dealing in a more extended way with the theory invasion.

Susan Balz

... The characteristics of beauty most admired in this period, c 200-100 BC, are clearly shown: small head, high waist, broad hips, full breasts. ★



* Barron, John. *An Introduction to Greek Sculpture*. New York: Schoken, 1981; p. 160.
(Borello, Fuglem)

commentary

It has been a long and busy year at the Committee, but in spite of it all we have come

close to fulfilling some of this year's mandates. One of them was to start discussing and researching, first among ourselves and then, through different events, the idea of curriculum within the Faculty of Fine Arts, to acknowledge as well as to fulfil the need for more women and/or feminist related courses. The Committee is interested, not only in maintaining, suggesting, and creating new and already established courses, but in trying to unveil the mechanisms that create and/or destroy a conducive and positive learning environment for students in general, but particularly female students. For instance, as Linda Bien suggests in her article (p.4,5), there is definitely room for restructuring of a predominantly competitive educational system and, as Susan Balz points out in "Speaking" (p. 1,2), there is also a need to recognize difference, not only in manner of speaking, but in approaches to art making, both in the studio and in the classroom.

The "Theory Invasion" grew out of the Committee's curriculum work. Our goal was to present a panel where we could "map out" some of the dominant theories "invading" the art world, theories that are important in learning how we talk about art work (s) and in trying to identify our relationship to that work in a pluralistic context. We expect to continue the Theory Invasion series next year and hope the discussion the series has generated will not stop. To reiterate Susan Balz in her recap of this event, we sincerely appreciate suggestions from students and faculty in pointing to issues that should be discussed in more depth as we plan future workshops, etc.

This is our first year of graduate work and also our first year as members of the Committee. It has been a rewarding experience so far, and we hope to continue in getting this newsletter out to you next fall. We welcome contributions from all areas of the Fine Arts Faculty, including staff, instructors, graduate students, but especially undergraduate students. We share the desire of many others in the MFA program for greater communication between graduate and undergraduate students. We see this newsletter as a forum for people in all areas of the Faculty to voice their concerns, particularly those regarding women's issues. We extend our thanks to our contributors to this issue and we hope to hear from many more of you before our next publication in September. Have a great summer!

*Mariela Borello
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